

John Death



Richard Shekari

John Death
By
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Dedication

To *Shoham*, thanks so much for the encouragement.

A Man's Word

Sunday, 27th July

As the white sports car slowly drove towards the entrance to St. Joan's chapel to the sight of the onlooking congregation, John glanced at the tall elderly priest through his window, should he step down and join the congregation as they marched into the chapel or just zoom off. His eyes gazing at the concealed scarred face of the priest, reluctant on whether he should join them, John lifted his foot off the accelerator and unto the brake pedal, putting the car to a halt right in front of the chapel as he stared at the priest.

The church members were a bit frightened as they wondered who it was and why the stranger parked there, the Priest excused himself and walked down the steps to meet John.

"I hope you've found peace, my son!" said the Priest as he lowered his head down to have a good look at John.

John rested his left arm on the open window with his fingers on the steering wheel, he sighed and looked at the dashboard, sighed again then turned to the passenger seat and picked a laptop, a big brown envelope then handed it over to the Priest.

"Thank you, John!" said the Priest, "Thank you very much! I can't thank you enough for this great sacrifice."

John turned his face away from the Priest.

"You're welcome to worship with us anytime you want, Brother John!" added the Priest, loud enough for the church members who were standing outside to hear.

As the car window rolled up, John drove off without saying a word to the kind Priest.

“Thank you once again!” said the Priest, as he waved joyfully then he turned back towards the chapel and saw his church members watching him, he then smiled at them as he stepped up.

“Praise the Lord, brethren!” he said, “Isn’t this a good day to serve the Lord?!” he hugged one of the members before proceeding into the chapel.

“Oh, father,” said one of the women, “I was really scared at first, I thought that stranger was going to pull out a gun and start shooting at us!”

“Oh come on, Sister Mary!” said another, “You and your hallucinations!” she joked as they all laughed.

“The world is clouded by darkness in these times, Theresa,” replied Mary, “You can never tell, dear!”

“Right you are, Mary,” said the Priest, “But we have the good Lord on our side! Fear not!”

As John drove off, he stared at his rear view mirror, watching to see if the Priest was still standing where he left him. John switched on the car radio and played a rock music as his mind pondered on the events of the past few days.

The Director

Monday, 21st July

“John Dead?” hollered the petite secretary as she stared at the people in the waiting room with a feeling of awe.

“Death, John Death!” he answered, “I am he!” with his hand up.

The rest of the people turned to gaze at him in astonishment.

“The Director would see you now!” added the secretary, “Please follow me.”

John stood up, dropped a fashion magazine on the table as he picked a big brown envelope. He aligned his red tie properly as he walked to the secretary.

“After you,” he said.

The secretary led him to the Director’s office as he walked behind her, smiling at the ladies in the office who couldn’t but drool over the sight of the elegant, timid looking tall hunk dressed in a black suit as they made their way into the office.

“Ah! John! I was just telling my friend Idris here about you. Please come in,” said the Director as he adjusted his reading glasses, he stood to his feet and stretched his hand in warm reception, “Am I glad to see you.”

John and the Director shook hands, as he nodded to the one called Idris after withdrawing his hand from the Director’s clench.

“Actually, this is like the millionth time he’s telling me, the story!” said Idris, a short dark-skinned bald fellow in white crocheted garment, “I finally get to meet the boss’ superman! Good to see you, buddy!”

“Good to see you too, sir!” answered John.

"Sorry for keeping you waiting, you know how the office is; meetings here and there, and what does a man get at the end of the month?" said the Director, "Not enough money to keep the mistresses happy, huh?!" they all burst into laughter, "Please have a seat, son!" he pressed a button on the desk phone as the secretary answered, "Vanessa, we're going to need that bottle of scotch!"

"I'll be right there, sir," she responded.

"Good," said the Director, "Have I got a surprise for you, son? I've saved that bottle for ages! We need to celebrate!"

"Every time I hear the word surprise it reminds me of the incident at Terry's, the night we went for his birthday," said Idris.

"Ah! Terry, he's a jerk. Forget him!" interjected the Director.

"So, Terry brought a hooker home on the night of his birthday," added Idris as he laughed, "He thought his wife was still out of the country cause she left for some training about a week before that!"

"Like I said, Terry needs a brain transplant!" added the Director, "Maybe goat's brain would do him good!"

"They both came home drunk, he and the hooker, so as they staggered into the living room kissing and smooching, throwing their clothes here and there, the lights came on," Idris said as he tried to control the tears falling from his right eye, "He got the surprise of his life; he didn't know that his wife came home and organised a surprise party for him."

John giggled and let the smile linger a bit on his face as he struggled not to lose his cool amidst the entertaining men.

The secretary walked in holding a tray with three glasses and a bottle of scotch on it. The two men were still laughing as she served them.

"He called me the night she kicked him out of the house," said the Director, "I told him he deserved it!"

"Sorry, I don't uh...drink," a modest John said, as she offered him a shot.

"Wow, you don't drink or you quit, son?" asked the Director.

“Actually, I’m kind of taking a break for now!” replied John, “The last experience didn’t favour my reputation!”

“Well, I hope I get to be there when you resume from your...break!” said the Director as they laughed, “Nevertheless, here’s to John...for um...saving my life!” he raised his cup, “Lift your cup, son. You can toast to it but you mustn’t drink to it!” he joked.

“To John!” added Idris as the men toast to the small occasion, “You’re a good man, John!”

“Yeah, but the funny thing about life is, good men don’t live long in this world,” the Director said, “Thank you Vanessa, you may go now!”

As the secretary walked out of the office, the Director gently sat on his chair in time to catch Idris staring at her bum.

“I told you Idris, she’s getting married in two weeks. Keep your eyes and zippers away from my secretary. Eh?” he giggled, “Her fiancé is an old friend’s son.”

“Okay! Okay! Alright, but hey, I’m your old friend too, boss.” Idris joked, “I remember you telling me whatever is yours belongs to me as well!”

“Get a life you short-circuit, you’ve got a beautiful wife and kids, what more could you possibly want?” the Director jested, “So, John. I hope that’s not your CV in the envelope right there,” pointing his finger at the brown envelope John held.

“Well, it is, sir!” John responded sheepishly.

“Let me have that,” the Director inquired.

John gently handed the envelope over to him.

“Copies, I hope?” said the Director, “Right?”

“Yeah!” John nodded.

“You’re already qualified for anything once it comes to me, son!” said the Director as he squeezed the envelope through the shredder, “Martha would kill me if she finds out I let you in with a CV after what you’ve done for me. She really can’t wait to see you,” he smiled, “Idris here will take you to your new place tomorrow,”

he belched, "Excuse me boys. Hmm! Idris, remind me to go easy on the breakfast next time."

"Mmm!" came Idris' response.

"Where was I?" he said, "Oh yes! He will take you to your new apartment and will also let you know how we get down in the real world, son. I want you to be part of the family. If you're okay with what you'll find, then you can report at the house the day after tomorrow," he stood up gazing at John as he yawned, "But in case you don't feel comfortable with the whole thing, John. Take this," placing a signed empty cheque on the table and slid it over to John, "You can have it, plus the apartment...and go chase your dreams with it if you want, son."

"Here's my card!" said Idris as he sipped the last drop in his cup, "Lines are open twenty four-seven"

John collected the complimentary card from Idris, loosened the tight from his tie and sat on the edge of his chair bedazzled, staring at the empty cheque.

"Go on, take it! You've earned it, son," said the Director generously, "I wouldn't be standing here today if it wasn't for you. So, consider this a token of a favour returned. You deserve more than this!"

"Sir," said John, "With all due respect I don't think this is..."

"Just take the damn cheque, buddy," interjected Idris, "It's yours for real."

The Director picked the cheque from the table and walked towards John. John gently stood to his feet.

"Here! You can cash whatever you want whenever you want, son!" the Director slipped the cheque through John's inner pocket, "Tax free, there's no catch! Money isn't worth my life so, for giving me a second chance to live again, I need to do to you what my heart would find warming! Call Idris first thing tomorrow morning, so he'd go show you your gift from me!"

"Thank you, sir!" said John.

“Say no more, son. It’s nothing,” he said, “By the way, I really would love it if you’d come meet my wife and daughter at the house!”

“It’ll be my pleasure, sir!” John responded, “You can count on that.”

“Alright then, you can go now,” said the Director.

John thanked him once again and made his way out of the office.

“Hey, John!” called the Director,

“Yes, sir!” responded John as he turned.

“You play golf?” he asked.

“No, sir!” John responded, “Not into sports!”

“Well then, maybe one day you’d tell me how you got that name over a bottle of scotch. Whoops! It’s gotta to be coke now, I guess!” joked the giggling Director, “John Death! Unique, I love that name. It’ll always be a reminder of what you saved me from.”

“Thank you, sir!” replied John.

“How about deer hunting?” the old man inquired again.

“Well...That, maybe!” he said.

“First Saturday of next month,” proposed the Director, “You’d love it! You take care, son!”

“I will, sir,” replied John as he smiled and shut the door behind him.

Acclivity

Tuesday, 22nd July

“She got five bedrooms in her belly and she is all yours, man!” said Idris as he toured John round the new apartment, “Two Jacuzzis in two of the bedrooms. The rest of the boys sure ain’t gon’ like you!”

John wore a cold smile as they walk through the fully furnished modern apartment located at the heart of the city, one of the structures that best described the cultural wealth of the city. The stylish and classy furniture made John felt he wouldn’t miss a thing in the world once locked within the dark modern interior.

“State of the art furniture and of course the latest technology in sound gadgets,” said Idris, “You’re much younger than me so I presume it’ll be easier for you to figure out how to operate these high-tech babies!”

Idris took John round the house, everything was new and classic.

“And this is your gearhead, buddy,” added Idris as he opened the door to the garage, “She’s a beauty, isn’t she?” referring to the white convertible SLR McLaren Mercedes parked in the garage, “Hit the road with this super twin-turbo baby and you’ll understand why she cost a fortune!”

“Impressive.” John said as he bent to have a look at the interior, “The only time I’ve ever saw this baby was on TV!”

“Arguably one of the most beautiful cars of all time!” Idris added, “Well, you live the dream now, buddy! The apartment with everything in it has got your name on it, however, the rule is, if you wanna work for the boss you’ve got to return the signed cheque and go on a \$26, 000 a month allowance which will be wired to

any account of your choice on the 20th of every month or...You can still keep the house, the car and the cheque. Walk away like a bird flying down into the sunset. I'd land on the beach and pick as many bugs as I want if I was you! It's your call, buddy!"

John brought out the cheque from his pocket, while still admiring the car; smiled, sighed and handed it over to Idris without saying a word.

"Are you sure about this, man?" asked Idris.

"A hundred percent sure, my friend!" John responded.

"Hmm! Wise choice, man! Wise choice!" complimented Idris as he pocketed the cheque. "You'll be briefed tomorrow at the house, by the boss himself."

"You said that like he knew I wasn't gonna go for the cheque!" said John.

"Trust me, he said you'll never go for the cheque." replied Idris, "The boss thinks and says that you're a good guy! However, a piece of advice; when you get to the house just do yourself a favour and not try anything stupid with the boss' precious gem!"

"Precious gem?' I don't follow!" John responded.

"Diane, his daughter," Idris said, "I know he has got a soft spot for you in his heart, you know, the whole-saving him from Tobriano's boys and all. And from the look of things, you're young and charming, and with a charisma like that, Diane will forget her brains in the Johns. Oh, pardon me for that, it just came out. It's not like..."

"We're cool!" said John.

"The thing is, I know exactly what will go down once she sets her prurient eyes on you. Just saying."

"Hmm! You have no idea what will go down!" John mumbled as he caressed the white convertible.

"What? I didn't get that?" Idris interposed.

"I said, you have no idea what will go down!" John responded, "Every man has got his own principles!" turning to Idris, "You don't like me, do you?"

"Oh no! I've got nothing against you, man. I'm just giving you a heads up, buddy!" said Idris, "I've been around the family for more than a decade now! The boss would shoot down an angel or any plane that cast a shadow on his daughter's skin during summer."

"You made it sound like the man is a maniac, give him a break!" said John.

"Trust me," said Idris as he walked close to the convertible, "As soft as he might appear on the surface, it's safer for you to sleep in a hungry lion's den that ride with..."

"Can I have the keys, already?" John interjected.

"Sure, why not," said Idris, "Here!" as he flung the keys, "The keys to the apartment and the car!"

"Thank you, man!" said John.

"You're welcome!" said Idris, "By the way, how were you able to take out six armed men at the supermarket like that! The way the boss described it, he made it sound like a scene from the movies!"

"Let's just say I'm a professional at what I do, buddy!" John boasted.

John shut the door on entering the car, "What does this button do?" pressing a button, "Oh! Figures!"

The garage door rolled up before Idris could utter a word, and John didn't hesitate to put the big engine to the test.

"I believe you know your way out!" said John as he reversed.

"Yes, I do. Will pick you up 9:30am tomorrow," said Idris, "The boss wants us there by 10am prompt."

"Okay, man!" he said, "See you then!"

"Schmuck" Idris whispered.

Meet the Podruffio's

Wednesday, 23rd July

Two guards with a police dog each stood by a pair of large sophisticated iron gates as Idris and John drove in a black SUV through the statues that ornamented the big mansion, the magnificent estate had three swimming pools with a spectacular view over the lake. John noticed the presence of many gardeners and a few armed men.

"Loads of security in here," said John, "The old man must have got many enemies!"

"Yeah, it wasn't like this until the day after you saved him," said Idris, "The boss fired the other guys and hired these bad boys when he realised that one of his competition, Tobriano means business. It's a fortified wall in here, these boys wouldn't even let a mosquito come near the fence now!"

"They look like they could eat a tiger alive!" said John referring to the guards.

"My thought too, buddy! Oh and um...John," said Idris, "That thing I told you about the boss' daughter, it's no joke, okay? Some fool got fed with lead weeks back for raising his hand on the precious gem."

"Is that right?" asked John.

"Damn right, my man," answered Idris, "And that fool was actually the supposed-to-be future son-in-law!"

"Hmm! That's cold!" John added.

The car pulled up front at the mansion. Idris and John got out, one of the guards made a move to frisk John.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you. Special guest here," said Idris, "You do that, the boss would cut those fingers off, Tony!"

The guard moved back staring at the men. John followed Idris into the mansion.

"Aah! John! Finally, you are here," said the Director as he welcomed them, "Sonia, go get Diane," talking to one of the maids, "Diane! Martha!" he cried out loud, "John Death is here!"

"Good morning, sir!" said John as he shook the Director's hand.

"Morning, John!" responded the Director, "You got here just in time. My daughter was just about going out! I hope you like your new place."

"Oh, it took my breath away, sir. I super love it." said John, "Woke up feeling like a prince this morning."

"Oh, trust me," said the Director, "I know that feeling."

"Daddy," said a soft tender voice.

The men turned.

"Ah! There she is!" said the Director.

As the young and beautiful Diane made her way gently down the stairs in her red dress, John was bedazzled by her sight.

"Isn't she beautiful?" said the Director as he smiled joyfully.

"Yes," responded John, "Yes, undeniably!" Briefly lost in a world of fantasy as Diane walked down smiling, wearing the most beautiful dress he had ever seen which had an enormous paillettes that created a mermaid impression. Diane's smile expressed one thing only; that she need not make any apologies for her curves.

"Honey, this is the man!" said the Director, "I want you to meet John Death!"

"I feel alive now," whispered John as he smiled.

Diane tried to cover her teeth in order not to fully give in to his jokes, but anyone with a good sight could tell that he got her right where he wanted with his good sense of humour.

"Hi, John!" she said, "Daddy told me a lot about you," she stretched her tender hand for a shake.

"Did he?" John gave a smug look, "Forgive me, but I always find it hard to lie, especially when swept off my feet by the mere sight of..."

"Beauty?" interjected the Director as he place his hands on their shoulders, "Maybe you should teach her how to play golf, son!"

"Oh, so you're a professional just like daddy, I see!" she said.

"Trust me, if playing golf was flying a shuttle I'm that toddler trying to get off his cradle!" John responded with a smile, still trapped in her beautiful big blue eyes as he held her hand, "I'd also like to make one confession; at the moment, I feel like a nation that has lost its defences."

"An honest man? Now, that's a rare thing these days!" she replied looking into his eyes!"

"I'll be in the pool room if you need me, boss!" said Idris as he cleared his throat. The Director nodded in response then turned to John and Diane.

"Young people, anytime you meet you feel like it's love that makes the world go round!" he said as he excused the two, "John, I want to introduce you to someone. I'll be waiting for you in here, once you're able to escape from that Alcatraz!" laughing as he walked into another room.

"It seems my father likes you," she said as she retired her hand from his grip.

"Some nobodies sometimes get lucky to be loved by some somebodies!" he said, "What made you think so?"

"Because daddy has never made anyone cancel their plans just so they'll get to welcome anyone!" she replied.

"It feels good to know that one doesn't need to look up at the skies at night to gaze the stars," he said.

"What do you mean, John?"

"You're the most beautiful woman I've ever laid my eyes on!" he said softly.

"Wow!" she sighed, "I have a feeling you have been down the dungeon for as many years as you've lived in this world, John!" she smiled.

"John!" hollered the Director, "Haven't you subdued the guards yet?" his laughter echoed through the mansion.

"My father needs you," she said, "Suspend the theatrics for now. Another time, Maybe?" as she walked through the foyer.

"Where can I find you?" he asked.

"Haven't you heard, John?" she said, "Daddy says everybody should stay home today in order to welcome the superman!"

John kept staring at her curves as she cat walked towards the exit overlooking the lake. As soon as he remembered the Director was waiting for him, he quickly tiptoed to meet him.

"Ah! He finally made it!" Joked the Director who stood in front of a giant painting, "Come," he took a sip of water from a glass, "I want you to meet someone special!"

John walked and stood not far from the Director, "Is this?" staring at the big beautiful painting of an older looking woman.

"Yeah," said the Director, "Diane's mother!" he smiled at the painting as he picked his reading glasses from the small artefact table below the painting, wore it and looked at the painting with such deep affection, then sighed, "Martha passed away when Diane was just a little girl," he said, "Her exit from this world totally changed me! Oh! Martha, what a woman! She had a heart that's far much bigger than the world!"

John smiled and tried to act sympathetic.

"Her heart was too good and too heavy the world could not carry it," added the Director, "The world is not a playground for good people, John! I learnt that the hard way!"

"I'm sorry for your great loss, sir!" said John.

"Ah! Nothing to be sorry for, son!" he said, "I used to be like you when I was young, you know; so full of energy, trying to channel it in order to make the world a better place and all. Not

until the day God took her away from me! Now, Diane is all I've got, she's the only good thing left in my life, son!"

John was speechless.

"I grew up poor," said the Director, "My dad wasn't really the go getter type. Just a peasant, and my mother? She died of cancer," he pursed, "We were so wretched my father couldn't look me in the eye after mother passed away. But you know, sometimes no matter how hard life hits you, if you stay strong and stand tall on your own two feet, life will quit the fight and give you a break, and that's when I met Martha while working the field one sunny day. The bus she took broke down near the fields and while the driver was trying to have it fixed, she came to me asking for water to drink." he smiled, "When I first saw her, she knew if anybody was to ask me my name I wouldn't be able to remember it," he wiped the tears from his eyes as he manage to suck his pride in, "She never cared about my background. Even when I proposed to her three years later, knowing full well I was still struggling, she said yes!" he smiled, "Well, she uh, jumped into the wagon and we continued the struggle and start a new life together!"

"I really don't know what to say at this moment, sir" said John.

"I am a man of many adversaries, son!" he said, "And for men like me, everyday gotta be treated as the last day, you know! Men of many foes have got only two problems; the clock's always ticking, and you can't trust anybody!" he sighed, "You can call me a paranoid old punk but when you are in line of my type of business, you'd watch your back even against your own shadows!"

John looked at the Director and then set his eyes on the painting again, "She's beautiful."

"Come over here, son," said the Director, "Let me show you something!" he removed his reading glasses and placed it back on the small table along with the glass of water he was holding then walked towards a large glass window.

John walked along and stopped right behind him.

“How would you like to look after something precious for the old man?” asked the Director, referring to Diane who was playing with a puppy outside the mansion.

“I um, you mean?”

“Yeah, my daughter!” he responded, “I have a feeling the tectonic plates beneath my feet are going to shift a bit from the way things are going and to be sincere, son, I know this may sound rather odd but, you are the only one I can trust for now!” as he turned and looked straight into John’s eyes, “Can you do that for me?” putting his hands in his pockets.

John sighed, looked at Diane and the puppy, “Sure, sir! Anything for you!”

“I can see you two have already acquainted yourselves, so I don’t think she’ll be a headache to you in any way,” said the Director as he turned and faced the lake smiling, “Your work starts right now, son!”

Miss Podruffio

Friday, 25th July

"You seem to be fond of red ties," Diane said as she chewed a bubble gum, "Where did you get a name like that?"

"It's a long story," John replied, as he observed some of the statues in the garden where they walked adjacent to the lake.

"I am a girl, I love long stories!" she said as she seductively smiled and flaunt her body walking in front of him, in her peach dress, "You don't seem to talk much, not like the first day!"

"Well, I didn't know I'll be tasked to look after you!" he replied.

"Protect me, you mean?" she said, smiling, "I think daddy's plan is way beyond that!"

"He cares about you?" he said.

"Tell me about you, John!" she said.

"Hmm! What would you like to know?" he asked.

"I would love to know everything," she turned and stood right in front of him, "Tell me, John! Tell me anything," wetting her lips.

He opened his mouth to talk but stammered as he set his eyes on her peached-moist lips, "I don't think this is the right place for that, I mean, right time-for uh..."

"Let's go to your place then!" she said.

"What?" he responded.

"You heard me, John!" she said, "Don't worry about nothing, the big old lion seems to like you. Baby, you don't have any problem!" wrapping her arms around his neck, "I think you can get away with almost anything. Besides, I won't tell on you!"

"I don't think that's a good idea," he said in a weak tone.

"My father hired you to protect me, right?" she asked.

"That's right!" said John.

"If you want to keep your job and his trust then I say we do as I want, yeah?" she added, "I suggest you do whatever it takes to keep your job, John. Because the last time some clown didn't let me have my way, daddy made sure he never lived to see the sunrise!"

"That's a joke I presumed," he said, "Tell me about it!"

"I'm an independent gal. But this sweet guy walked to me one night at the club, he told me he liked me. I kind of liked him too cause he looked a bit different compared to the other guys in my life, you know. Well, I told him if he really wants to go down he needs to understand that I'm a free gal, he said he didn't care," she bragged, "So, we started seeing each other and he kept sending me flowers, telling me he wanna marry me and all. Well, we dated for a couple of months and I began to fall for him, then on the day he proposed to me, we went clubbing that night and he caught me in the bathroom making out with the club owner, and he just...Lost control. I told him to calm down, but he wouldn't listen so I slapped him like the dog that he was," she puffed and popped the bubble gum, "He broke up with me right there in the club, could you believe that? How could he do that to me?"

"That's all?" John inquired.

"No," she replied, "I came back home that night crying, tore my dress and lied to daddy that he beat me up. So, daddy had him taken care of!"

John gently pushed her hands off his shoulders and grabbed her by the neck looking straight into her once beautiful yet innocent blue eyes, he watched her struggle for life as her pupils dilated. Diane tried to kick him on the groins but missed, she tried hard to loosen her tender neck from his grip as the muscles around her neck began to swell up. As he squeezed her throat from her last dying breathe, he knew she had not only lost the last ounce of breath but the last ounce of purity in his eyes. John frightfully stared at the dying Diane as her neck snapped in his grasp.

One of the maids witnessed what happened, she screamed and was so frightened she could not move, her voice drew the attention of some of the guards.

John flung Diane's body off, as her corpse landed on the lawn, he stood there and took a deep breath then started to walk towards the mansion. Three of the guards approached him not knowing what went down, John pulled out two pistols and fired at them without missing a shot, sending them to their knees as he walked past the terrified maid.

John got into the mansion killing all the guards that came up against him, including a shocking Idris who hid behind a small bar in the pool room. He walked upstairs crashing the door to the Director's bedroom.

"Podius Podrudio!" he shouted, "Time to go!"

"What...what happened, son?" said the scared old man as he managed to come out of the bathroom, where he was hiding, "Where's Diane? Is she safe? I heard gun shots, son. I heard gun shots. Is my baby okay?"

"She's dead, Podius," said John, "Diane is dead, just like Martha. You may probably have to call the artist again!"

"What?" said the Director, "I don't understand?"

John walked to him and seized him by the neck, and start to hit him. He pulled the Director out of the bedroom and kicked him.

"Son, what's this all about?" asked the scared Director, "Did anybody make you an offer to do this?"

John shot the last guard that made it through the door as he pushed the Director down the stairs, then looked back to see the Director struggling to stand on his feet, he fired two shots at his legs and slapped the director with his pistol on reaching him, the old man went straight to the floor like a dry leaf from a dead tree. He then grabbed the Director by the collar and dragged him into the room where the big painting of Martha hung.

John walked to the painting, stared at it for a few seconds, spat on it then pulled out a lighter from his pocket and set the painting ablaze.

“What have you done?” cried the Director, “What are you doing? Oh, Martha!”

“Nothing, Podius, nothing!” John replied.

“Who are you?” the Director asked faintly, “Who do you work for?”

“On this job?” responded John, “Let’s just say it’s a token of my favour returned, Podius!” as he walked to the Director, he pulled out a photo and flung it at the Director’s chest “Do you recognise the person in that photograph?”

“I can’t freaking see without my glasses!” the Director cried, “Oh Diane! What have you done, son? Whatever the feud, why didn’t you just kill me at the office and settle it there?”

“It’s gotta be the heart, Podius” John replied, “It’s gotta be where it’ll hurt you the most, old man!”

John looked around and saw one of the Director’s reading glasses on the artefact table below the burning painting. He walked to it, “I can’t get it, old man! I don’t like the sight of your wife!” he picked the glasses anyway then returned to the Director who was still bleeding from the wounds in his legs.

“You son of a whore,” cried the trembling old man, “and I thought one day we would invite you over for a dinner, so you would tell us how you got that name! I guess the jokes on me now!” he coughed.

“I actually looked forward to that dinner too, Podius,” John said, “But your precious daughter wasted the lifelines you two had left with her mouth!”

“What are you talking about, son?” said the Director in pain, “Hand me the freaking glasses! Oh, Diane. Baby, I’m so sorry I brought this on you!” he wept as he tried to have a good look at the photo John threw at him.

John unknot his red tie, threw the glasses away then strangled the Director with the tie, "You won't need it where you are going!"

The Director struggled for his life looking at John in the eyes, he put up a fight for a while then suddenly gave a final twitch.

Minutes later, John got out of the mansion and into the Black SUV. He adjusted the rear view mirror to have a good look at his own face. He then gently used his left hand to pull off the synthetic mask he was wearing and laid it on the passenger's seat along with the photo he gave the old man, then used a handkerchief to wipe his face and neck.

He pulled out his cell phone and switched it on, then Kick start the car. While the engine steamed up, messages began to storm into his phone but he ignored them as he kept staring at his face in the mirror. A call came through, John sighed, smiled and picked it.

"Hey Angel," he said.

"You're so full of crap, JD. Do you know that?" said a female voice over the phone, "Where the hell have you been?"

"Had to go take care of some business, Jessica!" he said, "Do you miss me?"

"No! I don't," she responded.

"Come on, baby, admit it," he teased, "Confess."

"Okay, I do miss you," she said, "But gosh, do you know how many big contracts we have missed? Urgh! JD, I was saving money to get that yacht I told you about, now I called and the idiot told me he sold it. Could you believe that? It's-all-your-fault!"

"Don't worry, we will get you another one!" he said, "Calm down, Jes!"

"I sent you an email this morning," she said, "Check it and if it's a green, Target's location is Nairobi, Kenya. You'll find all necessary details in there. If you do this for us, at least it'll help me pay for another yacht with my own cut!"

"You know what?" he said, "How about I give you a present for saying you missed me; I will give you ninety percent of my cut from this contract! Deal?"

“Oh my God, seriously?” she said excitedly, “Is this for real JD?”

“As real as Death can be, Jes!” he said.

“You’re a darling!” she replied, “I’m already swimming in dollars! Dollars! Dollars!” she rapped excitedly.

The Confession

Monday, 15th July

John walked through the aisle of an empty chapel, on reaching the altar he stared at the giant crucifix on the wall in front of him, he took a turn to his left and into the confessional.

“Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned,” John whispered on his knees, “My last confession was about a decade ago and these are my sins; I have lost count of the lies I’ve told, committed adultery, and have been rebellious to the words in the good book.”

“For your penance,” said the Priest, “Please pray...”

“That’s not all, father!” John interposed, “I will need you to listen if you really want to help!”

“Okay...I’m here if you are willing to share, my child!” responded the Priest.

“Someone had my brother killed about three weeks back, and in the process my sister was violated. She was five months pregnant, all these over a little misunderstanding my brother had with his girl at a club...” said John, “...and I’m here to avenge them!”

“My child, there is no need to do that,” the Priest cleared his throat, “Deuteronomy 32:35 says; Vengeance is Mine, and recompense, Against the time when their foot shall slip; For the day of their calamity is at...”

“I have been reading that chapter for the past 13days, father!” John responded, “Foreswear the scriptures and talk to me in a language my flesh can comprehend!”

“You see, child,” responded the Priest, “Why we need to forgive is not so the enemy can go scot-free after the evil they had done to us...but so that we shall have everlasting peace within us. The spirit

of Vengeance is one of the heaviest burden, child. People who wronged you and those who plan evil against you are working under an evil spirit that controls them. Forgive, so you don't end up like the enemy you are trying to fight! Whatever the prob..."

"I kept my life away from them so they don't get to be affected by it, in any way," John sobbed, "I have failed them, I was never there to protect them when they needed me the most!"

"Son, you need to know that it's not your fault, you should also know that Jesus can take that pain away and give you the peace your heart desires," said the Priest, "You sound troubled and hurt!"

"But father," said John, "Any God who would sit back and permit my enemies do to me that which they wished and willed, and the same God says I should forgive my foes at the time I am about to make a move to take vengeance, isn't it obvious that He is more of their god than mine, and more on my enemy's side?"

"No! No, Son," answered the Priest, "You've got it all wrong, child. You see, God's ways are not our ways. In order for you to find inner peace...you must forgive those who wronged you, including those who hate you for no just cause, and pray for them, and bless them. For the children of the light must let that light in them shine forth so that God can heal and lift them, this way His name is glorified!"

"I didn't come here so you'd help me change my mind, father" said John, "I came here so you'd help me trap the man who did this to my family!"

"Pardon?" stammered the shocked Priest as he made a move to go out of the confessional.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you, Samuel!" John said as he folded two photographs and pushed them through the latticed opening.

"Where did you get this?" the Priest asked on unveiling the pictures, "This...this is not me, these are photoshopped! I'm a minister of God! Mister, I do not know who you are but if you do

not get out of my church, I won't have any choice but to call the police!"

"Go ahead, Samuel, call the cops," said John, "I've got more where that came from. Even pictures of your dealings with your boss Tobriano, and how you help him smuggle and move cake in form of communion through the communities. I don't think the church organisation would take that lightly once they find out, let alone the cops?"

"I do not know what you are talking about," said the Priest in a trembling voice.

"I know you don't, because I don't either, father Samuel!" said John, "But I'm sure these shots do!" he pushed more photos through.

The Priest pulled out a white handkerchief and wiped his face, watching the photos as he trembled, "What do you want?"

"Now you're talking, Sam," John answered, "Now you're talking! So, you and I are going to make a deal, okay?"

"Okay!" he replied, still sweating like a goat in the box, "What exactly do you want?"

"There is a man called Podius Podruffio, aka the Director," said John, "I believe you've heard of him. He works for the National Petroleum Company but you and I know exactly the kind of shady business he runs both home and abroad. Being the fact that you work for his rival in the business I guess you know him far well than I do. Are you listening, Samuel?"

"Yeah...yes, I'm listening!" he answered.

"Good!" said John, "Now, his daughter's birthday is Saturday the 19th, four days from now. You'll find a way to make your boss believe that Podius has put up strategies to not only take over the entire territory but also to kill him. Your job is just to convince your boss to attack Podius on Friday the 18th at the Ariesian plaza! Are we clear?"

"I'm sorry, I can't help you with that, and Mister..." said the Priest, "Get out of my church!"

John got out of his compartment and rushed to the side where the Priest was seated, he forced it open and hit the Preacher with the edge of his pistol on the forehead, and again on the lower jaw.

"How are you sure he'll be at the plaza that day?" cried the bleeding Priest.

"Good question, father." John responded, "Well, since you asked, let me get back to my side of the box so we'd continue our deal!"

John left the Priest and went back to his compartment and on his knees, again.

"Podius always and only goes to one place to get his lovely daughter a present for the past six years. So, my best guess is that he'll be there on Friday. If you convince your boss to send some of his finest and best boys after Podius on Friday, you and I are going to be best of friends and I'll deliver to you the rest of the photographs by myself, including the soft copies in the very computer I saved them. I will walk away from your 'holy life,' so you'd continue your-ministering job. I mean, work! I'll let you go along and save more lives for Jesus! How about that?"

"That's it?" asked the Priest, "Once I do that, I'm free?"

"You're not on my list yet, father Samuel," said John.

"How do I reach you?" asked the Priest, "and what name do you go by?"

"Worriest not thou on how thou can reacheth me, father. I shall find thee!" came the reply, "The name's Death, John Death!"

Appreciation:

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Richard Shekari.

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Richard Shekari is a novelist, lyricist, singer, and a poet from Abuja, Nigeria. A Humanitarian with the National Emergency Management Agency, Nigeria. He is an alumnus of the Federal University of Technology (ATBU) Architecture department Bauchi State, Nigeria.

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